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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MOSCOW 000849

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TAGS: PREL PARM MNUC KNNP KN RS

SUBJECT: DPRK: MOSCOW REACTS TO SIX-PARTY RESULTS

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Classified By: Pol/Min Counselor Alice G. Wells. Reasons: 1.4 (B/D).

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SUMMARY  
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¶1. (C) Moscow's North Korea hands -- both official and unofficial --- welcomed the results of the February Six-Party Talks but remained critical of U.S. policies towards the DPRK. While the MFA's terse announcement summarized the decisions made in Beijing, Foreign Minister Lavrov was more expansive in praising the U.S. for "flexibility" in salvaging the process. However, the majority of Moscow experts continue to see a nuclearized North Korea as the product of U.S. policies. While quick to criticize the U.S. approach, the Russian experts acknowledged that Moscow's role is limited and that Russia will continue to rely on U.S. and Chinese leadership in the negotiations. End summary.

Enthusiasm In Check

¶2. (C) On February 13, with the conclusion of the fifth round of Six-Party Talks, the MFA issued a short announcement welcoming the agreement as giving a new impulse to Six-Party process. On February 15, Foreign Minister Lavrov elaborated on the GOR's reaction by praising U.S. flexibility in achieving a compromise. At the same time, he argued that U.S. financial measures ("unilaterally imposed sanctions") had earlier derailed the process. He pledged that Russia would provide energy and humanitarian assistance to North Korea and would continue to negotiate on North Korea's debt to Russia. (Note: Moscow has recently announced that the Russia-DPRK intergovernmental commission will meet for the first time in six years in Moscow on March 22-23 to discuss debt and transportation ties.)

¶3. (C) Oleg Davydov, a Senior Counselor on the MFA's Korea Desk, was less positive about the results of the talks. He told us that the GOR would not make a "celebratory announcement," in order to avoid the possible embarrassment of having to retract it. He cautioned that in dealing with North Korea, what was important was not an agreement but the way it was subsequently interpreted.

Regime Change Not An Option

¶4. (C) DPRK hands in Moscow think tanks were quick to pocket the Six Party success, while accusing the U.S. of losing time because of our approach to North Korea. Russians argued that U.S. policy lacked clarity -- did the U.S. want regime change or did it want a denuclearized DPRK? Aleksandr Vorontsov of the Oriental Studies Institute suggested that as distasteful as the regime was, and despite much "wishful thinking," the DPRK was stable and would survive for the foreseeable future.

The only option was peaceful co-existence, because efforts to induce regime change had failed. North Korea, in turn, having lost its traditional security guarantor, the Soviet Union, and faced with a hostile U.S. policy, had armed itself. In the meantime, the South Koreans were threatened by U.S. willingness to choose a military option. In the end, Vorontsov said, U.S. policy had created a nuclearized North Korea and an increasingly anti-U.S. South Korea. Vorontsov welcomed the February meeting results although he warned that mutual mistrust between the U.S. and North Korea would necessarily make further progress difficult.

DPRK Wins A Round?

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¶5. (C) For Vasiliy Mikheyev at the Institute for World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), the only positive feature of the February meeting was that it took place. According to Mikheyev, the February agreement spelled success for North Korea, which had promised little but would now receive economic aid. He judged that the agreement would only reinforce the North's inclination to play the nuclear weapons card. Mikheyev supported an engagement policy but thought that incentives were misdirected; the North should be encouraged and rewarded for concrete steps toward reform, not just for closing nuclear facilities.

Who's Unpredictable?

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¶6. (C) Aleksandr Zhebin at the Institute of Far East Studies, who served in the Soviet Embassy in North Korea, attributed the nuclearization of North Korea to the collapse of the Soviet Union and to what he termed the U.S.'s "wrong"

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policy. It was known during the Soviet era that North Korea was trying to acquire nuclear technology but it was a luxury then, not a necessity. When the Bush Administration focused on regime change and invaded Iraq, North Korea "had to" go nuclear. For Zhebin, North Korean thinking was predictable while U.S. policies were not. Like many of our interlocutors, Zhebin stressed that the February results were essentially a return to the 1994 Agreed Framework, albeit in a multilateral guise.

Verification: the Key

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¶7. (C) Experts unanimously agreed that verification remained the biggest problem. Given that the February agreement did not cover the current stockpile of weapons or weaponized material, Anton Khlopkov, Deputy director of the Center for Policy Studies in Russia (PIR Center), worried that North Korea could construct up to ten nuclear devices, using what it already presumably possessed: 40 - 60 kilograms of plutonium. According to Khlopkov, it took the North's nuclear test to have the five parties focus on the main issue; how to de-nuclearize North Korea. Kholpkov was free in sharing the blame for not preventing a nuclearized DPRK, pointing at the U.S. "obsession" with human rights and democracy, Japan's demand on abductees and China's refusal to use its "available" tools to influence the North. Russia had not been wise to end its economic aid to North Korea because it removed leverage. He urged that the Five coordinate closely to bring a joint vision and concrete, deliverable steps to the table.

Sanctions: Poor Substitute for Engagement

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¶8. (C) Like most other Russian officials and experts, Aleksandr Khramchikhin of the Political and Military Analysis Institute thought that sanctions only reinforced the regimes meant to be hurt by them. Georgiy Kunadze, former Ambassador to South Korea, agreed and told us sanctions would not work.

North Korea would never entirely give up its nuclear program.

The "economic strangulation" would affect the North Korean people but not the leadership.

China, the Leading Force, and Russia, in the Rear

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¶ 19. (C) Aleksandr Lukin at the Center for East Asian and Shanghai Cooperation Organization Studies at Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), claimed that the Six-Party process had been derailed by the U.S. but salvaged by China. The U.S. pursuit of a military option on the peninsula was simply unwise, said Lukin. Now that the U.S. was preoccupied by Iraq, it had to follow China's lead. Lukin joined other experts in believing that Russia had neither the means nor the political will to lead the process.

Mikheyev concurred with Lukin that China had moved from a simple organizer of the Talks to a leader which could steer the process. Aleksey Bogaturov, Dean of MGIMO, maintained that both Russia and the U.S. had failed in their dealing with North Korea. According to him, Russia, happy to be a passive participant in the Talks, would most likely continue to follow China's lead.

Next Steps: NE Asia Architecture?

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¶ 110. (C) Vorontsov felt that the U.S. still had the greatest leverage over North Korea: the prospect of diplomatic relations. If the U.S. played its cards wisely, the North could be contained. Mikheyev suggested that the Talks' fifth working group -- the Northeast Asia Peace and Security Mechanism -- could provide a serious impetus to the negotiations and to the region. With or without the North's participation, the five could widen the agenda for collective security, he thought. Bogaturov agreed. He felt that the key missing element in the Six-Party process was a well-defined common aim, not just the rhetoric of de-nuclearization of North Korea. An engagement policy based on a well-coordinated political dialogue combined with economic cooperation should be the guiding principle, he added.

Comment

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¶ 111. (C) Moscow experts remain skeptical that the North will entirely abandon its nuclear program and concede that Russia has little to add to the discussions. As quick as they are to criticize U.S. policy, they recognize that the U.S. and China must continue to lead the way in dealing with a nuclearized North. That said, Russian discussions with the

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North after a six year hiatus bear careful watching.  
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